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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN VIETNAM

REF: A. HANOI 527 B. HANOI 3000

1. (U) This is an action request -- see para 5.

2. (U) Summary: A large interagency conference chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem in Ho Chi Minh City September 9 articulated the GVN's intended next steps in a coordinated antitrafficking policy. The Deputy Prime Minister recommended that the government propose a long-term program of action and designate a lead agency. The GVN's strategy tracked closely with the objectives of the USG-funded UNODC Vietnam antitrafficking project, which the Ministry of Public Security has recently signed and approved. This likely shows that USG assistance is having a positive effect and is guiding at least some of the GVN's thinking on trafficking. Current NGO and international organization antitrafficking activities in Vietnam are thin, but coordinated, and would be even more effective given greater resources and a more coherent GVN strategy. End summary.

Trafficking situation in Vietnam

3. (U) According to UNICEF and Interpol estimates, "tens of thousands" of Vietnamese women and children have been trafficked to third countries in the last three to five years. The problem can be roughly divided along geographic lines, with victims in the north mostly trafficked to the PRC for marriage, labor, sex industry work, and adoption. (Note: in cases of Vietnamese infants trafficked to China for adoption, the victims are almost always male newborns. They are usually kidnapped from their parents in northern Vietnam and provided for fee-based adoption in China.) In the south, most victims are trafficked to Cambodia to work in the sex industry, though a sizeable number (estimated 1,200 per month) of women from the Mekong Delta go to Taiwan for arranged marriages. It is not known how many of the women who go to Taiwan (or to a lesser extent, Korea) are trafficked, but some definitely are.

4. (U) The lack of hard data complicates efforts to evaluate and respond to the trafficking problem in Vietnam. UNICEF and Interpol both admit that their estimates are more guesses than concrete information. The GVN does not maintain statistics, and what information it does provide is compromised by the fact that very few police or security officials make a distinction between trafficking and alien smuggling (there appears to be only one term in Vietnamese for both). UNODC has submitted a project proposal that would collect some more useful and reliable data on trafficking in Vietnam (ref b), and we are waiting for Washington's response to this proposal.

5. (U) Action request: Embassy would welcome an update or response to ref b proposal as soon as possible.

GVN response

6. (U) Within the GVN, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) unit liaison with Interpol is also the designated investigative authority for trafficking cases. On the policy and prevention side, MPS shares responsibility with the Ministry of Justice, the Women's Union (a nation-wide "mass organization" under the umbrella of the Vietnam Fatherland Front), the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs' Department of Social Evils Prevention (MOLISA/DSEP), and the Border Guards. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Consular Affairs Department plays a role in returning victims to Vietnam. Local Peoples' Committees also have input into how local projects are run. However, there appear to be no overall coordinating authority, formal lines of communication, or interagency tasking authority. In addition, there is only very limited coordination and communication across either provincial or national borders. Compounding the problem, awareness of the issue is low even among law enforcement agencies likely to encounter traffickers or their victims, such as Customs or Border Patrol. The capacity of local authorities to investigate and prosecute traffickers also appears weak.

Deputy Prime Minister's Conference

17. (U) The September 9 conference in Ho Chi Minh City brought together officials from every relevant ministry and office, as well as participants from various mass organizations and other designated Vietnamese groups. Its announced purpose was specifically to address trafficking in women and children. At the end of the conference, DPM Khiem directed MPS and the Prime Minister's office to propose a long-term program of action and to recommend a lead agency to take responsibility at all levels of government. The local press quoted a Vice Minister for Public Security outlining the following proposals:

(A) Take measures to change the life of the people in far-off and border areas, especially those in the South West and border provinces in the North, and measures to support returnees (women and children);

(B) Increase awareness of trafficking in order to take precautions against it, uncover traffickers, and coordinate with authorities;

(C) Continue to complete and build the legal system, especially to overcome weaknesses in labor export and marriage laws;

(D) Improve investigation and severely punish criminals, trafficking rings, and especially transnational syndicates; and,

(E) Expand international cooperation.

Action on the last item is apparently underway. The Minister of Public Security is scheduled to visit Beijing September 16, and one of his agenda items is to sign a "cooperative mechanism" between the two countries' security ministries addressing, among other issues, trafficking in persons.

18. (U) DPM Khiem also cited four main requirements to implement the above tasks effectively:

- (A) A commanding (coordinating) agency under the government;
- (B) A favorable legal "corridor";
- (C) A program with specific road map; and,
- (D) Adequate funding and training of cadres.

(NOTE: With the exception of dealing with socioeconomic development in areas prone to trafficking, all of the para 7 proposals and all of the para 8 requirements are covered in the 'expected outputs' section of UNODC's antitrafficking project proposal FS/VIE/03/R21, approved and funded by the USG in FY03 and signed by MPS in August, 2003. END NOTE.)

NGO and International Organization actors

19. (U) International assistance against trafficking in persons remains modest, totaling only about USD 5 million annually. According to our contacts at UNICEF and UNODC, the NGO and IO efforts are well coordinated to avoid duplication of effort and waste, but would be even more effective if the GVN established a clearer strategy and designated an agency to lead the official antitrafficking effort, as now appears to be in the works. Major ongoing projects include the following:

-- Oxfam Quebec, Save the Children UK, and Save the Children Sweden are carrying out a project in Vietnam's northeast (Bac Giang, Quang Ninh, and Lang Son provinces) aimed at awareness-raising through the distribution of leaflets and at local economic development through the provision of training and support for women starting their own businesses.

-- the ILO: The ILO's project is part of a subregional project including all of the Mekong subregion countries. It is located in Quang Ninh and Thanh Hoa provinces and in Ho Chi Minh City. ILO focuses on advocacy and awareness raising; capacity building in MOLISA, Border Guards, MPS, and the Vietnamese Women's Union; and direct assistance.

-- IOM: The IOM is focused on protection of returnees. Also a regional Mekong project, IOM has opened a shelter for returned trafficked children in Ho Chi Minh City and provides assistance to trafficking victims who want to return to Vietnam.

-- UNICEF has a Vietnam component to a subregional antitrafficking project, which focuses on protection of victims and institutional capacity building, as well as legal reform. UNICEF's project is unique in that it incorporates children themselves in project planning.

-- A new UNODC project, with funding by the USG, focuses on capacity building among law enforcement agencies, legal

reform leading to accession to UN protocols on trafficking, and international law-enforcement cooperation.

-- The Asia Foundation project, also funded by the USG, focuses on prevention of trafficking in Quang Ninh and An Giang provinces. TAF works with Vietnamese NGOs and the Women's Union to improve conditions and opportunities for women in the provinces. Activities include training of women political candidates and business managers, and provision of microcredit loans for women starting small businesses.

-- the UN Interagency Project in Bangkok administers a USD 3 million project against trafficking in women and children in the Mekong Sub-region, including Vietnam, and attempts to collect data and to improve internal coordination among GVN agencies. The UNIAP is currently on hiatus in Vietnam pending the GVN's approval of its 'second phase' projects.

10. (U) Comment: The GVN is increasingly seized with the trafficking issue, as was evident in this unprecedented, recent high-profile conference. As in dealing with other major social problems, the GVN is hampered by a lack of resources and competence, and turns to the international community for assistance. The next challenge will be to move from the fairly modest ongoing and planned awareness-raising and capacity-building projects into more practical measures to fight against trafficking and assist victims.
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